

Statement of Delton L. Butler  
Chairman, Southwest Mississippi Resource Advisory Committee  
Before the House Committee on Agriculture  
April 7, 2005

Good Morning. My name is Delton Butler and I am Chairman, Southwest Mississippi Resource Advisory Committee.

My roots in Franklin County, Mississippi, go back 8 generations to 1790. My family once owned 6 sections (3840 acres) of land that is now Forest Service land. I am 50 years old and have lived in Franklin County all of my life. I have two sons that plan to put down roots here, as well. I have worked for American Railcar Industries, a railcar repair facility located in Bude, Mississippi, for 28 years. My wife Nancy and I own and operate an RV park that is located on land that we own beside the Homochitto River.

Forests are an important part of our county, and about one quarter of our county is managed by the US Forest Service. As a Federal agency in a rural area, relationships between the Forest Service and local folks can sometimes be a bit strained. PL 106-393 provides an opportunity to improve these relationships.

RAC Projects and Concerns:

I responded to an inquiry sent to me by the Forest Service. This inquiry spoke of Public Law 106-393 and asked if I would be interested in becoming a member of the Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). My response was "possibly". I was contacted sometime later and informed that I had been chosen to serve on the Committee. At our first meeting I was selected to serve as chairman and I am presently filling that position.

Our RAC has been in operation for about a year. In this short time I have become convinced that Public Law 106-393 has the potential of being a very good thing for our area.

Our first project was submitted to us by the Amite County Board of Supervisors. It consisted of refurbishing and paving 10.3 miles of roads and 2 separate watershed projects on creeks that crossed the roads involved. The project met all of the criteria and was approved by the RAC.

This project has since been completed and was a big success. The Amite County Board of Supervisors have reported back to us with pictures of the finished project that look very good. The project cost \$180,000.

We have, at our latest meeting, approved two more projects. One is in Franklin County for funds to start a waste disposal system for the watershed area around a new lake (Lake Okhissa) being constructed on Forest Service land. This project cost \$525,045. The other is another road project for Amite County consisting of 2.5 miles of road to be resealed...costing \$48,000. We have a sub-committee working on the possibility of opening an ATV trail on Forest Service land in the Homochitto National Forest. These projects are improving our access and recreational opportunities on Forest Service lands.

While we are excited about the projects being proposed, there are some concerns about certain parts of Public Law 106-393 as it is presently written.

We had a very difficult time finding RAC members from "nationally recognized Environmental Organizations." We had to go about 90 miles away to the Jackson, Mississippi area to find two people willing to serve. This is well out of the Homochitto National Forest area, and isn't within the 7 counties that should make up the RAC membership. If we must replace them every 3 years, this could be a real problem. As you consider reauthorization, it would be best to allow flexibility in naming RAC members to additional terms.

The way the votes are counted: On one of our projects, one of the two environmental members voted against the project. If the other had voted against the project, the project would not have been approved. These members do not live in the area. I do not believe that this is fair to the counties that chose to participate in this process. It is my opinion that a vote should count as a vote, as Robert's Rules of Order dictates.

There are seven counties that have Homochitto National Forest land within their boundaries. Our RAC has representatives from each of the seven counties, but only two counties have chosen the option to receive their money in the way described in this law. The way I understand the law, only the counties that chose the option should or can spend the money given to them. (See Title

II Special Projects on Federal Lands, Sec. 201 (l) and (2)) If this is not the case, then what incentives do the counties have to choose this option?

Title III - County Projects:

I'd also ask whether counties that don't elect the stabilized payment should be eligible for Title III projects.

After reading this law, it is evident to me that it will be very hard for a small county in Mississippi to be able to spend this money, since in many cases the money must be spent on county reimbursements for services while the county has not budgeted for, nor has the money to budget for, these projected services. We have about \$195,000 in Title III alone. In my opinion, Title III of this law is written too narrowly. We need money for things like an emergency/rescue boat and dock for our new lake. Title III money cannot be used for this or any purchase of equipment. There seems to be plenty for "planning" but nothing to help after the "planning" is done.

For instance, Title III funds can only be used to reimburse the county for a supervisor, not to pay the juveniles or adults that are actually doing the work. Again, for a small county, this is of little help when you don't have the money to budget in the first place. If we could use this money to pay the juveniles, we may be able to use someone already on staff to supervise them.

Conclusion

One of the Findings of Public Law 106-393 states ""There is a need to build new, and strengthen existing, relationships and to improve management of public lands and waters." I could not agree more! The relationship between the Forest Service and the native population in my area does need improving. There is mistrust felt toward the Forest Service by many of the landowners adjoining the National Forest. In this case the definition of mistrust is: Not being able to trust them to do what is right. This is not to say that the people that work for the Forest Service are bad people. It is my opinion that these are highly trained and highly motivated individuals who are following standards laid out for them. These standards make it difficult to deal with native landowners and others, with any sense of The Golden Rule... "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

You need only to own a piece of property next to the National Forest to understand this feeling. 25% of Franklin County is National Forest; so you don't have to look too far to find a landowner that has property that is either bordered by or surrounded by National Forest. In many cases these landowners must cross National Forest to access their property, and in many cases the Forest Service must cross private property to access National Forest. There are many cases that I know of, that when all was said and done, the person dealing with the Forest Service came away feeling mistreated or bullied.

I know that there have been good reasons for all the regulations set forth by the Forest Service, including the need to prevent dumping garbage on National Forest, moving land line markers, timber theft, lop-sided land-swaps and a host of other problems. However, as one highly respected businessman told me, "They should not treat everyone like crooks!"

In conclusion: I do not want to leave on a sour note. Quite the contrary, if it were not for this law I could not share these feeling with you and I don't want anyone to think that we are about to revolt, for this is not the case. The Forest Service does a lot of good in our county. But if we are trying to make relationships better between the native population and the Forest Service, these things must be talked about.

I feel that Public Law 106-393 is a good thing that can, with all our help, be made better.

Thank You

Delton L. Butler

**Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Required Witness Disclosure Form**

**House Rules\* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2003.**

**Name:** Delton L. Butler

**Address:** 121 Round Top Hill RD S.E. Meadville Ms. 39653

**Telephone:** Home: 601-532-7171 Bussiness: 601-384-5841 ext. 251

**Organization you represent (if any):** Southwest Miss Resource Advisory Committee

- 1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2003, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do NOT require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:**

**Source:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Amount:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Source:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Amount:** \_\_\_\_\_

- 2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2003, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:**

**Source:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Amount:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Source:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Amount:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you:** NA

**Signature:** Delton L. Butler

\* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: *Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*

**PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.**

**Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses**

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

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1. Name: Delton L. Butler
2. BusinessAddress: 121 Round Top Hill RD S.E. Meadville Ms. 39653  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Business Phone Number: 601-384-5841 ext. 251
4. Organization you represent: Southwest Miss Resource Advisory Committee
5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:

American Railcar Industries for twenty eight years. Title: Inspector Supervisor / Customer Service .

My wife and I owned and operate an RV park.

I am Chairman of RAC in my area.

6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:  
  
I was born and raised in Franlin County Ms. Which is comprised of 25% forest Service Land. I am fifty years old.
7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:  
  
I am chairman of the Southwest MS RAC.  
  
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**PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.**

